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Cold Sassy Tree
BY OLIVE ANN BURNS



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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-reading**Discussion/Travel Brochure**

Objective: Understanding the importance of setting
Participating in a group discussion
Preparing for a close reading of a literary text
Creating a travel brochure

Activity

Cold Sassy is Olive Ann Burns' fictional small town in Georgia. Its name derives from a grove of sassafras trees that long-ago-travelers referred to as "the coldest spot between the mountains and Augusta." One lone sassafras remains near the train depot, as Will Tweedy reveals the momentous events of his fourteenth year in 1906.

Think about a small town in which you have lived or about which you have read.

As a class, discuss what you know about life in a small town. What do all small towns have in common? Describe the pace of small town life. List the positive aspects of living in a small town. What are some of the drawbacks? How does life in a small town affect its inhabitants?

Create a travel brochure displaying your ideal small town.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 1-3

Literary Devices

Objective: Recognizing common figures of speech and literary devices
Understanding how figures of speech and literary devices enrich a work

Activity

Locate examples of the literary terms listed below in the first three chapters of the book and place them on the Literary Terms Chart that follows. In the last column, write what you think the expression really means. Definitions and different examples of these terms are also in the Appendix.

Anecdote: a brief incident or narrative set within a larger work that makes a particular point or sheds light on a certain character. For example, in a biography of George Washington, the story in which he cuts down a cherry tree and then confesses to this misdeed is inserted to illustrate Washington's honesty. It is an anecdote.

Maxim: a statement or saying that makes an observation about life. For example, "A rolling stone gathers no moss" means that if someone keeps moving from place to place, he or she will never gain the growth that comes from a more stable life.

Hyperbole: an exaggerated statement, not always meant either literally or seriously, that makes a point about an incident or a character. For example, saying that a football player fills up the whole locker room by himself is a use of hyperbole.

Metaphor: a comparison in which one item is used to represent another. For example, the sentence, "He is a pig" is a metaphor, but "He is a jerk" is not. Saying that a basketball player is "a gun" is a metaphor for someone who is used mainly to shoot.

Dead metaphor: a metaphor that has been used so frequently that it is "dead" or missing any fresh meaning. Dead metaphors are sentences like "She is the apple of my eye," and "Bob is the top dog on this team."

Personification: imparting human characteristics to an animal, plant, or inanimate object. Saying that a barbed-wire fence is "human hands poised to scratch" is an example of personification.

Simile: a comparison using "like" or "as." For example, "Like a sneaky snake, he stole into the henhouse," or "As water rolls over a smooth stone, her words slid over the assembly."

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 1-10

Plot

Objective: Recognizing the use of flashback to move the plot forward
Incorporating flashback in an original narrative
Recognizing exposition

Activity

Will Tweedy recalls the events of his fourteenth year eight years later. Hence, *Cold Sassy Tree* is a series of flashbacks within flashbacks. As it begins, Will references Grandpa's announcement, and then he puts the day of the announcement, July 5, 1906, into context with other events. He hints at Granny Blakeslee's death, three weeks before, and "what happened to me on the train trestle." He remembers that it was right after the town's first July Fourth celebration since the Civil War.

Write your own introduction to a narrative using flashback. Begin eight years from now when something triggers a memory. Here is a sample beginning:

I was sitting at my computer desk when the smell of my wife's cooking reached me. The onion smell reminded me of the one time in high school...

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 11-20**Genre**

Objective: Examining genre
Participating in a class discussion

Activity

Even though *Cold Sassy Tree* is a coming-of-age novel; some may refer to it as a love story. It is also a commentary on a particular area of the country at a specific time. While Burns reveals her characters' prejudices against blacks, Mill Town residents, women, and all those who violate tradition, she does not make judgments or pose solutions. She merely relates a story steeped in the vivid details of small town life in the early twentieth century.

As a class, discuss the purpose of fiction. Should it reflect the times, shine a light on societal problems, or merely entertain the reader? Talk about your favorite books. In what ways do they reflect society and its problems?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 21-30

Characterization

Objective: Understanding character motivation
Synthesizing character traits

Activity

Write an "I Am" poem for Clayton, Miss Love, Will, or Loma. Draw your information from the character's words and actions in the novel. You may choose to use direct quotations where appropriate.

Line 1: Begin with the words "I am."

Line 2: Write three nouns about which your character has strong feelings.

Line 3: Write a complete sentence about two things your character likes.

Line 4: Begin with three nouns that describe qualities your character appreciates in other people. End the sentence with the words "are important to me."

Line 5: Write a sentence explaining something positive your character likes about himself or herself.

Lines 6, 7: Begin a sentence in line 6 in which you show something negative your character sees in himself or herself or in others; finish the sentence in line 7 by showing that out of something bad can come good. Use the word "but" or "however" to link the two ideas.

Lines 8, 9, 10: Write three short sentences explaining things about which your character has strong feelings – likes or dislikes. These do not have to relate to each other or to the previous lines you have written.

Line 11: End the poem with the words, "I am _____." (Fill in the name of the character you have chosen.)

Example:

1 I am

2 Rain, Forests, and Sunsets.

3 I like long walks and quiet times.

4 Honesty, Humor, and Peace are important to me.

5 I find satisfaction in a job well done.

6 I can be fearsome when my ideas are challenged,

7 But I thrive on intelligent conversation.

8 I love nature and animals.

9 I can be counted on to help.

10 I have strong feelings when a life is threatened.

11 I am _____.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 35

Writing Concisely

Objective: Communicating effectively
Extracting information from the text

Activity

When she and Rucker go to New York City, Miss Love Simpson sends Cold Sassy residents postcards. She personalizes each one with messages (mostly about the gifts she is bringing back) that effectively communicate that she wants to be friends. However, at that time, another, faster way of communicating existed, and it is not the telephone, simply because most residents of Cold Sassy do not own phones. The faster way is through telegrams, which are shortened letters that eliminate unimportant words. Telegrams cost for each word that is used. The word “STOP” is inserted after every sentence, but there is no cost for “STOP.”

Therefore, you wouldn't write a telegram that said, “It is impossible for me to go to the party. I am not feeling well” because these are numerous words that could be eliminated, which would save you some money. This telegram would be cheaper and have the same meaning if it were, “Impossible to attend party. STOP Sick.”

Your job is to write a telegram to any resident in Cold Sassy, supposedly from Miss Love Simpson while she is in New York, explaining her feelings about any other character, any event, or any place that is mentioned in the book. But, the message must be exactly 15 words long; “STOP” does not count in the 15 words you must use. Remember that each word costs money, so the telegram needs to be short and to the point.

Example: To Clayton McAllister

Never want you near Cold Sassy again. STOP Thanks for saddle. STOP Rucker and I'll enjoy it.